



# F-35 Lightning II Program

Release – 2017 12 11

## Wolf Pack completes Pen-wide VIGILANT ACE 18

*Story by Senior Airman Colby Hardin, 8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

**KUNSAN AIR BASE, Republic of Korea --** The 8th Fighter Wing at Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, completed its participation in the regularly-scheduled, joint-force training exercise, VIGILANT ACE 18, on Dec. 8, 2017, with members from Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

VIGILANT ACE was a week-long training exercise featuring U.S. personnel working alongside members of the ROK Air Force at eight U.S. and ROK military installations.



Four U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II's from the 34th Fighter Squadron, Hill Air Force Base, Utah, taxi down the runway at Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Dec. 3, 2017, during exercise VIGILANT ACE 18. The annual exercise featured 12,000 U.S. personnel working alongside members of the Republic of Korea Air Force at eight U.S. and ROK military installations. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech Sgt. Joshua Rosales)

This year, the Wolf Pack, with its contingent of F-16C Fighting Falcons, worked alongside six F-35A Lightning IIs from the 34th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, which is currently forward deployed to Kadena AB, Japan from Hill AFB, along with other U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine aircraft.

This marked the first time fifth-generation fighter aircraft participated in the training exercise on the Korean Peninsula.

"Like all of our readiness exercises, we really honed our ability to develop comprehensive, cross-functional, wing-wide solutions to difficult scenarios, as a wing," said Col. David Shoemaker, 8th FW commander. "What's unique about VIGILANT ACE is that we are not only looking at how we do this a Kunsan, but also with our Korean partners and other U.S. units in the

region. It's through this train how you fight mentality that we test our readiness, identify strengths and weakness, and continually evolve our combat forces."

As with previous years, VIGILANT ACE 18 emphasized the need for integrated combat training with ROKAF and U.S. Air Force Airmen. Additionally, like each readiness exercise, the scenarios evolved to incorporate the latest tactics, techniques, procedures and the latest technology; thus this year's involvement of the twin-tailed Lightning IIs.

"This is a great opportunity for some of our younger pilots to fly with our more experienced guys, as well as join in with the Wolf Pack and the rest of the air assets out here participating in VIGILANT ACE," said Lt Col Dave DeAngelis, 466th FS commander. "Having the F-35 here on peninsula during this exercise, which is intended to test the combined air picture, validates our ability to jump into the fight at a moment's notice and support forces in the region."

Although the U.S. and ROK Air Forces come together for training multiple times a year, this exercise brought a different type of atmosphere.



U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcons assigned to the 8th Fighter Wing taxi in front of an F-35A Lightning II assigned to Hill Air Force Base, Utah at Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea, Dec. 3, 2017. The 8th Fighter Wing hosted the fifth-generation fighters to train side-by-side during the week-long, bi-annual exercise VIGILANT ACE 18. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Frank W. Miller III)

“This was my third exercise as the Emergency Operations Center Manager,” said Capt. Alexander Graboski, 8<sup>th</sup> Readiness and Emergency Management Flight commander. “Compared to previous exercises, this one was very unique since we got to see all the flying operations from across the Peninsula come together and work towards a common goal of defending the peninsula.”

Launching and ensuring the ability to launch aircraft wasn’t the only training accomplished this past week. As exercise and real challenges presented themselves during VIGILANT ACE, the base leadership worked through various scenarios to ensure relevant and safe training.

“It’s important we train in these types of settings, because it gives us a chance to step back and approach a potential wartime scenario in a controlled environment,” said Shoemaker. “The mental rehearsal of options is just as important, if not more so, than how we actually end up responding in these exercises.”

VIGILANT ACE is one of many regularly planned exercises units on the Korean Peninsula conduct to maintain commitments between the U.S. and ROK, and more importantly, to provide a credible fighting force if ever called upon.